Human Problems: The Continuing Obstacle to success in information systems design?

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Overview of contents

The roots of IS/Computing thinking
The dominant technical paradigm
The "image/practice" paradox
The social/human "problem"
The potential for a socio-technical blend

Interim conclusions

The Roots of IS/Computing thinking
The Enlightenment "legacy"
The influence of the scientific and engineering traditions
The links to the positivist and functionalist positions
The translation of these stances into current practice and training

The Dominant technical paradigm
The perception of problem-solving as an "ends/means" function
The perception of the organisation as a goal-oriented entity
The perception of the organisation as a unitary body
The search for the "holy grail" of perfect sets of tools and technique

The "image/practice" paradox
The image: grounded in a technocratic view of IS
The practice: derives from an experiential view of the "messy" nature of organisations
The outcome: disappointment with IS
A way forward: recognition of the existence of the paradox (initially)

The social/human "problem"
Why have people been characterised as "problems" in IS development?
Why does the messiness of organisational dynamics get sidelined in IS thinking?
How can a major element be ignored in this way?
Can we ever develop successful IS without peoples active participation?

The potential for a socio-technical blend
The socio-technical tradition beyond IS
That tradition within IS
The participatory design tradition in IS and elsewhere
The benefits recorded in practice in these traditions
The way forward?

Interim conclusions
The arguments for such an approach are strong and persuasive
Other thinking and methods to date have not been universally successful
Democratic participation has potentially both pragmatic and social benefits
There is a sound foundation in practice and experience on which to build